MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES

17.1 General

For the past few years, the attention of the Ministry had been drawn to various shortcomings and where possible, I made some recommendations. Whilst several areas still need to be improved, it was noted with satisfaction that several of the recommendations made by this Office have been implemented. The Ministry showed its willingness to work in collaboration with my Office to bring along improvements.

Some of the improvements are highlighted hereunder:

17.1.1 Central Supplies Division

Marked improvements were noted at the level of the Central Supplies Division (CSD). The various warehouses have been re-organised and cleaned. Leakages and drainage problems have been attended to. Unserviceable items which were kept here and there, have been grouped together in the compound of the CSD, although they were still awaiting for write off. Most of the books/booklets which were lying dormant in one of the warehouses have been distributed to schools. As regards to the store where chemicals and laboratory equipment were kept, labelling has already been completed and these items were properly displayed on shelves. At the time of audit, in August 2008, a list of expired and dormant chemicals has also been drawn.

17.1.2 Supply of Furniture to Primary/Secondary Schools

In my 2006-07 Audit Report, I stated that various items of furniture were being procured without taking into account the stock of furniture available at the Ministry and that there were no clearly laid down procedures for the verification of furniture at the time of delivery at the CSD. Remedial actions have been taken in these respects.

17.1.3 Maintenance Units

Several shortcomings had been reported in my 2006-07 Audit report regarding the Maintenance Units of the four Education Directorates. The Ministry has issued a circular to the Directorates for compliance with recommendations made by this Office and instructions have been given to Technical Officers to monitor materials issued to schools. The Ministry should, nevertheless, follow up on these instructions and ascertain that my recommendations are being taken care of.
17.1.4 Book Loan Scheme for Needy Students

At paragraph 17.5 of my 2006-07 Audit Report, I stated that the implementation of the Book Loan Scheme entrusted to the Private Secondary School Authority (PSSA) was not well planned and that books lying in the Education Directorates for these students had not been transferred to the PSSA.

As at August 2008, some 18,000 books had been transferred to the PSSA for distribution to ‘needy’ students.

17.1.5 Stores Management – Education Directorates

Store records have in many cases been updated. However, the problem of storage space has still to be addressed.

17.1.6 School Information Technology Project (SITP)

The above project has been reviewed. A survey has been carried out in primary schools to ascertain the readiness of schools to accept computers and the scope of works to be carried out. Computers are being distributed taking into consideration the size of the school population and availability of space.

17.1.7 Supply of Primary School Textbooks

In my 2005-06 Audit Report, I drew attention that in respect of primary school textbooks, the number of pages printed was not verified systematically before effecting payment to the supplier.

The NCCRD has been detailed to ensure that the verification of samples covers also the number of pages printed against specifications. Also, in new contracts, a clause has been inserted for payment to be made on the basis of the actual number of pages printed.

17.2 Grant to Oriental Language Teachers

During the fiscal year 2007-08, some Rs 30 million had been paid as allowances by the four Education Directorates to teachers of socio cultural organisations for conducting evening classes in oriental languages as shown in Table 17-1.
Teachers were categorised as degree holders, advance level holders and ordinary level holders. The monthly allowances paid to each of these three grades of teachers were Rs 2,000, Rs 1,500 and Rs 1,000 respectively.

Some of the conditions attached to this grant included the following:

- Socio cultural organisations must be registered with the Registrar of Association or any recognised religious body or educational institution and submit evidence thereof.
- An Inspection team set up by Education Directorate shall examine applications made by socio cultural organisations for the registration of new evening schools. Visits will then be made to these schools to ensure whether they satisfy criteria for registration.
- The ratio of pupils to teacher needs to be at least 25:1 for conducting classes in oriental languages.
- Monthly allowance is to be paid to teachers on the basis of twelve sessions of one hour or alternatively on a pro-rata basis.
- Payment to teachers should be made after the attendance sheets submitted by the socio cultural organisations would have been certified by ‘Visiting Officers’, appointed by the Ministry to monitor attendance and to impart pedagogical guidance and training to teachers.

A total of 157 files had been examined as per Table 17-2.
Control over payment of these allowances was not satisfactory. Common features noted in respect of all four Education Directorates were:

- A programme of work/plan of visits for ‘Visiting Officers’ was not prepared and approved by a Senior Officer of the Ministry.
- Many socio cultural organisations did not submit their lists of pupils on roll for the academic year. The ratio of one teacher to 25 pupils might not have been respected. In other cases, the number of pupils present at each session fell short of that registered for the year reducing further the prescribed ratio of 1:25.
- None of the teachers’ attendance sheets had been certified by the Visiting Officers prior to payment. Inconsistencies were noted between the returns of teachers’ attendance submitted by the socio cultural organisations and the Visiting Officer’s reports.
- Visiting Officers have reported, amongst others the following:
  - Some teachers were not trained and did not have the teaching techniques. Despite regular intervention/suggestions, some were resistant to changes.
  - Some presidents/managers did not visit the schools regularly but just signed the attendance sheets of the teachers.

However, no action was seen to have been taken in that respect.

Other observations made for specific Education Directorates were:

- Visiting Officers were required by the Ministry to visit up to 12 schools per month. In Education Directorate Zones 1 and 2 there were no Visiting Officers for ‘mandarin’ classes. In Education Directorate Zone 4, no visits were carried out during the year 2007-08 for ‘urdu’ and ‘telegu’ classes while only one visit was effected for ‘tamil’ classes.
- Payment of a full month allowance was made to certain teachers of Education Directorate Zones 2 and 4 although they had not completed the 12 sessions of one hour monthly.
In Education Directorate Zone 4, there was no Inspection Team since 2007 to carry out visits in new evening schools although applications for registration had been received in 2008.

The Visiting Officers reported a case where a teacher in Education Directorate Zone 3 had been paid allowances up to May 2008 although he was not present since January 2008. Further, in respect of the same Education Directorate, a few cases were noted where registered teachers did not hold any qualifications and yet were drawing the above mentioned allowances. They had been registered since long and still had not enhanced their qualifications to an equivalent level for eligibility for drawing the allowance.

**Recommendations**

- Registered socio cultural organisations should be requested to submit the pupils’ lists at the beginning of each academic year. More visits need to be carried out to ascertain whether the pupils to teacher ratio is being respected.

- A plan should be prepared and visits made accordingly. The Visiting Officers’ reports should be signed by the manager/president of the socio cultural organisations and vetted by a senior officer of the Education Directorate.

- Attendance sheets of teachers should be certified by the Visiting Officers before allowances are paid. Necessary adjustments, if any, to allowances paid should be made for teachers who have not completed the 12 sessions of one hour monthly.

**Ministry’s Reply**

- The whole issue of the Evening Schools is being revisited. A survey of all schools has been carried out and findings do indicate that there are some teachers who have not been trained.

- While the prescribed ratio is 1:25 for some languages, this ratio cannot be applicable because of the relatively low number of learners.

- Action has already been taken to recoup excess payment. In some zones, a team has been constituted in August 2008 to carry out visits in new evening classes.

**17.3 Maintenance in Primary and Secondary Schools**

As of September 2008, there were a total of 259 primary and 156 secondary, state and grant aided schools in Mauritius.

A significant number of these schools is relatively old and needs constant maintenance works. So far, it had not been the practice at the Ministry to carry out preventive maintenance works in schools. Maintenance works were undertaken only when requests were obtained from schools.
Works costing up to Rs 100,000 were attended by the Maintenance Unit of each Education Directorate and expenditure was met from the item “Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds, Plant and Equipment”. Maintenance works up to an amount of Rs 1 million, revised to Rs 5 million as from January 2008, fell under the responsibility of the Infrastructure Management Unit of the Ministry and expenditure was met under item “Improvement, Renewals and Minor Projects”.

For the past three years, expenditure under these items had been as per Table 17-3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>2007-08 Rs m</th>
<th>2006-07 Rs m</th>
<th>2005-06 Rs m</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance of buildings, grounds, plant and equipment</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement, Renewals and Minor Projects</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In October 2006, the Ministry decided to put up a comprehensive plan of action for urgent maintenance works in all state and grant aided schools. With the collaboration of the Ministry of Public Infrastructure and Land Transport (MPI), structural surveys were carried out on the buildings and school premises of primary and secondary state schools during the period October 2006 to March 2007. 126 schools were identified having spalling and cracks problems and requiring repair works.

In December 2007 and January 2008, the MPI recommended the following:

- Appointment of consultants for investigations in respect of six schools.
- For the remaining 120 schools, remedial works would have to be carried out by Contractors through invitation/floating of tenders. It was decided to proceed with 13 of these schools on a pilot basis. Based on the results of the pilot project, needful would be done for the remaining schools. The tender documents for the 13 schools were to be ready by end of January 2008 for transmission to the Central Procurement Board.

Site visits were effected by my Officers in 35 Government Primary and State Secondary Schools during the months of April to June 2008. Most of the schools visited required some maintenance work.

As of September 2008,

- The Ministry has so far not worked out a short term or long term plan for maintenance of school infrastructure.
Consultants have not yet been appointed by the MPI although the Ministry had, on several occasions, pointed out that spalling had worsened and could represent a potential danger to the school population.

Tenders for the pilot projects had not been launched.

A plan for preventive maintenance works needs to be drawn and a priority list for repairs established. Urgent consideration needs to be given to schools with severe spalling/ceiling cracks problems. Not carrying out preventive maintenance may turn out to be more costly in the future in terms of major repairs.

**Ministry’s Reply**

- Tenders for the pilot project comprising 13 schools have now been floated at the Ministry’s level.

- The Infrastructure Management Unit is currently preparing a project write up for the renewal/renovations of all primary schools.

### 17.4 Improvements, Renewals and Minor Projects

Some Rs 31.7 million were spent during the fiscal year 2007-08 for improvements, renewals and general upgrading works in institutions under the aegis of the Ministry, as shown in Table 17-4.

**Table 17-4 Improvements, Renewals and General Upgrading Works**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of work</th>
<th>Rs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Renovation works</td>
<td>8,455,634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electric works</td>
<td>6,865,102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water proofing</td>
<td>5,445,354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replacement of naco frames</td>
<td>5,208,853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painting</td>
<td>2,712,371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upgrading works</td>
<td>1,534,034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fencing, construction &amp; boundary walls</td>
<td>1,296,618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarring works</td>
<td>172,095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>31,690,061</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The execution of contracts relating to minor works up to an amount of Rs 1 million was supervised by officers of the Infrastructure Management Unit (IMU). This ceiling was revised to Rs 5 million in January 2008.

17.4.1 Project Management

The following were noted:

- Documents relating to minor projects were placed in respective school files. A master record for all projects undertaken by the IMU was not kept. It was difficult to ascertain the status of any given project at a particular point in time.

- Reports on the performance of contractors were not available. These would have helped the Ministry in selecting future potential bidders.

- While the execution and supervision of minor works were carried out by the IMU, signed contract documents, performance bonds and insurance policies were kept at the CSD. Due to a lack of coordination between these two sections, in several cases, the performance bonds were not extended to cover the end of the maintenance period.

- For electrical works, the project start and completion dates were not always available. As such, it was difficult to ascertain whether works had been completed within the contractual period.

17.4.2 Electrical works at Sir Claude Noel Government School

A site survey was carried out by the Ministry in August 2006 and it was decided that all civil works should be completed before undertaking any electrical works. Nevertheless, on 28 September 2006, the contract for electrical works at Sir Claude Noel Government School was awarded to a private Contractor for Rs 472,840. Works were to be completed within four weeks of handing over of site.

It was only in November 2006 that the Ministry informed the Contractor that the site could not be handed over to him. The latter requested to postpone the start of the electrical works by five months.

Subsequently, the Contractor submitted a request for additional payment of Rs 47,000, being ten per cent of the initial contract value, for increase in price of cables and transport cost. The Ministry, in February 2007, informed the Contractor that only an increase of Rs 27,000 could be accepted. On 21 June 2007, the Contractor refused the proposal.

On 6 August 2007, fresh tenders were launched for the project. On 11 October 2007, the works were awarded to the same Contractor for the sum of Rs 668,992, that is an additional amount of Rs 196,152.
17.5 Cleaning services in Primary and State Secondary Schools

Contracts for cleaning services in primary and state secondary schools were awarded by the then Ministry of Education and Human Resources in September 2005 to three different Contractors for a period of six months, renewable upon satisfactory performance for further period of six months up to a maximum of two years, that is up to 30 September 2007.

One of the three Contractors was awarded the contract for the cleaning of toilets for an amount of Rs 2,864,098 and for the cleaning of school premises for Rs 6,497,088. However, the services provided by that Contractor were unsatisfactory. Several Schools have reported the matter to their respective Education Directorates, which in turn had drawn the attention of the Contractor to that effect. Given that there had been no improvement regarding cleanliness in schools, the Ministry decided to terminate the contract.

In July 2006, authority was sought from the then Central Tender Board (CTB) for the termination of the contract and to consider the award of the contract for cleaning of toilets and premises to the next best bidder, for those schools/institutions where the Contractor was offering its services. The CTB conveyed its approval in September 2006.

For unknown reasons, the Ministry did not go ahead regarding the termination of contract. There was no evidence that the CTB had been informed accordingly. It was not understood why the CTB had been approached to seek approval for termination of contract and then the Ministry did not go along these lines. In view of the numerous adverse reports from the various schools, value for money has not been obtained from that particular Contractor.

Given that the contracts of all three Contractors were to expire by the end of September 2007, the CTB’s approval was sought to extend the contracts on a month to month basis on the same terms and conditions as the original contracts until the award of new ones.

As of September 2008, one year later, cleaning services were still being provided on a month to month basis.

Recommendations

- The Ministry should ensure that it obtains value for money. It shall see to it that all clauses of the contract be strictly adhered to by the Contractor, failing which prompt appropriate action should be taken.

- New tender exercises should as far as possible be done within a reasonable delay so as to avoid stretching contracts on a month to month basis.

17.6 National Centre for Curriculum and Research Development (NCCRD)

The NCCRD started its operation in April 1993 under the aegis of the then Ministry of Education and Science with the primary objective to develop curriculum and undertake research. As of September 2008, 42 persons were working on a full time basis, 25 of whom
were panel members. In addition, some 50 panel members were employed on a part time basis.

In May 2003, the Ministry set up a committee to look into the set up and functions of the NCCRD. Various shortcomings were identified and the Committee recommended that a new organisation be set up as an autonomous body which would have the necessary human, physical and financial resources to carry out the functions that the Ministry would assign to it in the field of curriculum development.

As of September 2008, a proposed plan of re-organisation of the NCCRD was not yet worked out. Research on curriculum development had not been carried out, a graphic artist had not been appointed and a library/resource centre had not been set up.

I was informed that no appointment was made due to the uncertainty of the future of the NCCRD and no library/resource centre had been set up due to the poor infrastructural conditions of the present building housing the NCCRD.

17.6.1 State of Building

The building housing the NCCRD was in a deplorable state, with cracks on ceilings and walls leading to severe leakages and mass of concrete falling off the ceiling in certain places. The MPI carried out a structural survey in September 2007 and recommended that the panel and stores blocks be immediately vacated for security reasons and that nobody was to have access to these blocks as well as to the open verandah.

As of September 2008, panel members had been lodged at the Marcel Cabon State Secondary School but alternative accommodation for the stores had not yet been found.

17.6.2 Idle/Under-utilised items of equipment.

Several items of equipment were lying idle while others were not operating at full capacity. Due to the absence of a Graphic Artist, two Powerful computers used for graphic design, page layout and photo retouching, purchased in March 2001 and September 2004 for some Rs 540,000 were lying idle at the Graphic Section. Another item of equipment, an ‘Accuset Agfa’ was also not being used.

Due to bulk printing of textbooks for primary schools being contracted out, large scale flashing of films was no longer effected at NCCRD. Consequently, a film processor purchased in February 2004 for Rs 246,700 was no longer being used.

Several other items of equipment such as repromaster camera, binding machines, collating machines and offset printing machines were lying dormant, some of which since as far back as 1997.

A survey of assets needs to be carried out and all items of equipment which have become obsolete or out of use need to be disposed of after the relevant authorities have been obtained.
**Ministry’s Reply**

A room has been identified at the Marcel Cabon State Secondary School for relocation of the Stores Section. Arrangements for the shifting of whole of Stores Section will be completed by end of October 2008.

Arrangement is being made for the disposal of idle/under utilised items of equipment after obtaining all necessary clearances.

**17.7 Careers Guidance Service**

The Careers Guidance Service (CGS) operates under the aegis of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources. Its main functions are to offer careers information and guidance to people in secondary schools and school leavers in educational choices, employment matters and training opportunities.

Some 90 Education Officers followed a post graduate certificate in careers education and guidance course from 1993 to 1996 offered by a UK university, in collaboration with the Ministry. The purpose of that course was to allow each secondary school to have one trained ‘career teacher’ for the careers education and guidance programme. As of July 2008, some 60 of these officers were still in post in state and private secondary schools but were not officially delivering careers education classes which did not figure on the school time tables.

The CGS was to act as a resource unit and amongst its duties was required to give assistance and support to these careers teachers. The number of technical staff on the establishment of the CGS and the actual number of officers in post, are as shown in Table 17-5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Posts</th>
<th>On Establishment</th>
<th>In Post</th>
<th>Vacancies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal Careers Officer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Careers Officer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careers officer</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further, one of the two Careers Officers was following a course abroad, leaving only two officers at the CGS during a major part of the fiscal year. With such limited resources, the CGS had not been in a position to operate fully.

**Recommendation**

Over the years more schools have been built and a wider variety of subjects are being offered. Consequently, there is an increasing demand for careers guidance.
For the CGS to operate in a more effective way, it needs to be adequately staffed. There is an urgent need for the Ministry to strengthen the CGS in terms of human resources or alternatively to revisit the careers guidance policy to make it more responsive to the needs of the growing student’s population.

**Ministry’s Reply**

The Ministry is presently considering for the optimisation of the Careers Guidance Service in the wider context of Human Resource Management, with possibilities of linkages with the Human Resource Development Council being explored.

### 17.8 National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy Project

The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy project was introduced in 2003 to improve achievement at primary level. The main objective of the strategy is to ensure that every child leaving primary school is numerate and is able to read, write and spell at a suitable level to ensure his continuing education and to make him become an active member of society.

Implementation started in June 2003 with an extension of school hours by 25 minutes daily. Additional responsibilities were also entrusted to Head Teachers, Deputy Head Teachers and Teachers/Senior Teachers.

Monthly incentive allowances were provided to compensate for the additional responsibilities and extension of school hours. During the fiscal years 2003-04 to 2007-08, a total of some Rs 270 million had been provided under item ‘Incentive Allowance to Primary Teachers’. In respect of 2007-08 only, some Rs 43.5 million had been spent out of a provision of Rs 45 million.

Since its inception, the Project had suffered from a lack of clear implementation policy/guidelines. Although, extension of school hours and payment of incentive allowances started in 2003, it was only in 2005 that a Committee was set up to devise an implementation strategy. It was decided to proceed with a phased approach for implementation, as follows:

- **Phase I:** Transitory period of two years 2006 and 2007. During this phase, teachers would develop skills such as organising competency based learning/enlisting full student participation/group activities/peer group learning strategies/development of guided reading skills.

- **Phase II:** As from 2008 the integrated approach would become a general pedagogical approach in the teaching/learning transaction. This year would serve as the consolidation period. Year 2009 could be considered as a year when the Ministry can establish benchmarks in terms of pupil participation/pupils listening skills/literacy and numeracy achievements(any marked improvement at CPE level).

The project has suffered from poor planning and the absence of a clear implementation policy by the Ministry. Incentive allowances had been paid to teachers since 2003 but the very purpose of the project had yet to be attained. According to the implementation strategy, the project should have been in its consolidation stage.
Ministry’s Reply

- Various strategies were proposed by the Steering Committee for 2005 and 2006, to overcome weaknesses noted.

- New strategies to be developed in 2007 were proposed by the Committee in its position paper of October 2006.

17.9 Advances - Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam (SSR) Foundation - Rs 2,173,452

Advances were made by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources to the SSR Foundation, a body corporate, which in turn granted loans to full time and part time students of the University of Mauritius.

As of 30 June 2008, a total amount of Rs 2,173,452 was due by the SSR Foundation in respect of several loan schemes granted by the Ministry during the period March 1995 to December 2001. Included therein was an amount of Rs 2 million which was advanced in 1998. As of September 2008, some ten years later, no refunds have been made by the Foundation in respect of that specific loan. In the absence of records at the level of the Ministry, the terms and conditions attached to this loan were not known.

Ministry’s Reply

In September 2008, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Empowerment approved an extension of the deadline for the repayment of Rs 2 million advanced to 30 June 2011.

17.10 Deposit – Special Projects - Rs 5,568,789

Funds to an extent of Rs 1,275,692, donated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) for specific projects to be undertaken by the Ministry, had remained unutilised since their receipts, some three to five years back. Details are as shown in Table 17-6.
Table 17-6 Deposits Unused since date of Receipts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Received In</th>
<th>Projects</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 2003</td>
<td>National literacy &amp; numeracy strategy</td>
<td>241,960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2005</td>
<td>Definition of desirable standards of achievement each level of schooling &amp; assessment competencies</td>
<td>506,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2005</td>
<td>In-service training for lower primary school teachers: review &amp; reinforcing competence in new pedagogical practices</td>
<td>527,032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>1,275,692</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further, an amount of Rs 1,489,272 was received from an international organisation for the holding of a Ministerial Session in October 2004. As of 30 June 2008, Rs 996,518 were still being held in the Deposit Account.

In June 2003, an amount of Rs 380,000 was transferred from the Ministry of Social Security for projects in connection with the special education needs schools. As of 30 June 2008, Rs 329,050 were still unused.

The Ministry should closely monitor projects since their inception and make judicious use of cash aids. Long unspent balances held on deposit need to be investigated and appropriate action taken.